

Church of God, The Eternal

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What Can We Know About the Place of Safety?

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Dear Brethren:

One topic which has absolutely fascinated—even mesmerized—many of God's people over the last seventy years is the "place of safety" mentioned in the book of Revelation.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (Revelation 3:10).

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. . . . And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent (Revelation 12:6, 14).

The promise of a place of safety for God's faithful people—during the time of cataclysmic events prophesied to devastate the peoples of the earth before the return of Jesus Christ—has had a far greater impact upon the actions of God's people in these last days than most even realize. There may be no more significant influence which has affected behavior than fear of the coming tribulation before Christ's return, and the hope of escaping that horrific persecution through God's divine protection.

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was

not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:15–22).

History of the Place of Safety Teaching

The scriptures referenced above became the focal point for all of us who had our roots in the Radio Church of God/Worldwide Church of God. The hope of being protected in a place of safety was a key element in the theme thundered by Mr. Herbert Armstrong in radio broadcasts and in literature sent around the world. As a commissioned servant of God—inspired with divine revelation about the plan for man's salvation—Mr. Armstrong carried that gospel message very effectively indeed. No one else has since been blessed by God to achieve such success in spreading that good news of Christ's coming Kingdom on earth. And one aspect of that message which inspired many to act was fear of the events chronicled in the Bible to come upon this earth in the last days, and a desire to escape impending doom.

While some were first attracted to Mr. Armstrong by his exposure of error in mainstream Christian doctrine compared to the clear teachings of the Bible, many others responded primarily out of fear of coming future events, seeking to come under God's special protection from the wrath of the Lamb. They learned in time about the need to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days, tithing, clean and unclean meats, etc., and complied with whatever became necessary to give them hope of having God's special favor.

Over the course of years, many ministers in God's church placed special emphasis on the need to do—or not do—certain things, predicating the reward—or penalty—upon either making it or not making it into the place of safety. From this conditioning, many unknowingly over time began to shift their focus (if they ever had it to begin with) from seeking eternal salvation in God's Kingdom, to escaping more immediate tribulation. It became accentuated when the ministry began to emphasize a prophetic scheme pinpointing 1972 specifically as the time for fleeing to the place of safety. This caused many to fixate on a particular future year, and orient their entire spiritual endeavor to becoming worthy to be in that place of safety. Their hopes became set on that fulfillment.

The basis of the 1972 prediction sprang from believing God ordered highly significant milestones at intervals corresponding to nineteen-year time cycles within the Hebrew calendar. The first one in our era began at the time of Mr. Armstrong's first radio broadcast in 1934. According to this assigned benchmark, 1953 would be the next key point in time, which corresponded to the year the radio broadcast was expanded into Europe for the first time. Continuing this pattern, nineteen years later—1972—would promise something else of great magnitude to occur within the church. What would it be? The prophesied "beginning of the end"

was selected as that event. Notice an excerpt from an article in the November, 1961 *Good News* magazine, reporting on the Feast of Tabernacles just completed:

Mr. [name omitted] gave an especially helpful sermonette on the theme, "It Is Later Than We Think." He showed that we only have about 123 more months left before the time we MAY have to flee to a place of safety. We only have about two or three more third tithe years left at the most! And most of us will only have ONE more year, if we are farmers, to keep God's seventh year Sabbath for the land! When you think of it that way -- TIME IS RUNNING SHORT!

Notice these statements were always qualified—as in "MAY have to flee"—to provide the *possibility* of a different outcome, but they were still so conclusively asserted as to make laymembers count on the theory as absolute fact. And notice it was phrased to emphasize how few remaining "burdensome" third tithe years we were required to endure. What was the implied message? "Hang in there and put up with God's 'yoke of commandments' to assure you are eligible to be in the place of safety in 1972. It is only a few more years. We should be able to hold out that long." And that is unfortunately how many viewed their spiritual obligations. Even subconsciously—by expecting to flee within a few short years—they placed a limit on how long they were willing to abide under God's demanding requirements.

What has since become evident in the last thirty years is that not all—and perhaps very few—actually loved those original doctrines which are part of God's holy commandments. Rather than view God's laws as did King David—as a priceless treasure (Psalm 119)—many of those who responded to the ministry of Mr. Armstrong viewed the commandments only as a burden to be accommodated for a time, to assure one of favor to escape the tribulation. The requirements of true Christian living were only a means to a short-sighted end—securing one's spot in the place of safety.

A Restless Church Seeks Relief From the Law

Is it any wonder that when 1972 came and went, and it became evident many last-day events were simply not occurring on the predicted time-line, many members—as well as ministers—became restless? It was one thing to bear under these "harsh" requirements of God only until the early 1970s, but when it finally set in that Jesus Christ's return was likely years away in the future, the masses sought for "relief" from the burden of "hard" church teachings. Is it only coincidence that the change to allow divorce and remarriage in the church finally became approved in 1974, after its initial proposition by liberal ministers about the time of 1972? By no means. Can you begin to see therefore how a failed expectation about the place of safety may well have contributed as a catalyst to spark the doctrinal changes which marked the prophesied apostasy of the last days? (See our articles entitled, *God's Church—Revelation to*

Apostasy, The Doctrine of Divorce and Remarriage—How and Why It Was Changed, The Doctrine of Pentecost—How and Why It Was Changed!).

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first . . . (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3).

That falling away—apostasy—was not a departure from membership in the Worldwide Church of God (as was inferred), but the Worldwide Church of God's departure from Jesus Christ's revealed doctrines! And that departure was greatly facilitated by the unrealized hopes of many to be safely tucked into a place of safety in 1972, awaiting the return of Jesus Christ by 1975. When those expectations were not fulfilled, the church became eager for change.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Not only was every single doctrine of the church called into question thereafter—in part because of the disappointment generated by the failed 1972 prophecy—even the fundamental teaching about the place of safety itself became challenged. Certain high-ranking evangelists began to ridicule the teaching that God would take His people to a place of safety at all. Among other things, they asserted God could protect us all in our own homes. They failed to distinguish between the *doctrine* God revealed through Mr. Armstrong by divine revelation and the ill-advised prognostications about future fulfillment which came later—assumptions not inspired at all. Because the prophetic schemes generated by other ministers (howbeit accepted by Mr. Armstrong) did not come to pass, the revealed doctrines of Christ personally given to Mr. Armstrong unfortunately became suspect in their minds. But although God has not raised up a prophet in this age with the ability to interpret future dates and times of long-range prophecies, that does not change the fact He *did* reveal His perfect laws and plan of salvation through a chosen apostle. God's Church was founded in this age, and it was founded upon a sure foundation of doctrinal Truth. That includes the fact there will be a place of safety for God's people before the return of Jesus Christ.

What We Do Know About the Place of Safety

With all of the false assumptions in the past about God's place of safety for His people, what can we really know about it? To begin with, recognize that God provides no means to allow

us to know where it will be specifically, or when He will act to take His people there. Those still engaged in assigning names, dates, and places to these long-range prophecies have failed to learn any lessons from the past. When will they finally see that there are certain things God has reserved to Himself and He does not intend for us to know them in advance? (See our article entitled, *Prophecy—What You Should Know About It!*). The work of true Christians today is not deciphering specifics about prophetic fulfillment, but to prepare ourselves for the eventual revelation of those events by putting on more of the mind of Jesus Christ through overcoming the carnal self. The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17), not by advanced knowledge of where to be, and at what time, in order to come under God's protection. Those who are properly crucifying the natural mind—working to become more obedient to God's commandments and showing real faith to trust Him day by day—are the ones God will make sure are shielded from the terror of tribulation. They will not have to know in advance where and when to go. God is the one who will intervene miraculously to put them there.

In spite of the fact many have become disillusioned by the failure of men's prophecies about the place of safety and Christ's return, those events are still promised by God to occur. Man's foolishness in making ill-advised presumptions does not make God a liar.

What we do know is that during the midst of terrible tribulation on this earth in advance of Christ's Second Coming, a body of the faithful will be miraculously shielded in a place of safety for three and one-half years, even as Mr. Armstrong taught us. They will be spared the devastating trials to befall the rest of God's people (and the world) who are not protected. When Satan is not allowed to destroy these special ones, he will turn his wrath toward those God has left unprotected.

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:14–17).

Who Are Those Unprotected?

There are actually two classifications of those who will not be in the place of safety. The first includes those who have not been obedient to God's law, although called and given the opportunity to understand the Truth. It is those who are currently "in the way of destruction," who must be purified through tribulation.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them (2 Peter 2:20–21).

Those who have turned away from God's Truth for whatever reason—lack of conviction, disillusionment, personal offense, or self-deception—are headed for destruction if they do not turn from the path they are on currently. Carried to the ultimate end, it would be the unpardonable sin for them. But because God does not want to lose *any* of His priceless children, He intends to do everything possible to bring them to repentance, that they might share the glory of His immortal Family for all eternity. Not all will respond to this Fatherly chastisement and repent, but we do know that *many* will be humbled and returned to God through the horrifying experiences they will endure.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are *they which came out of great tribulation*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Revelation 7:13–17) [emphasis mine].

For those who have been rebellious against God—refusing to see their error in thinking—that tribulation will actually be a very great blessing. Any instrument which God uses to pull His children out of the fire is an expression of His great love and mercy. We should wish no one to endure tribulation, but if it is the only means by which they might be saved, such experience is absolutely a blessing, not a curse.

But there is a widely overlooked second classification of those to suffer tribulation. Certain ones—although absolutely faithful in orientation toward God—will become martyrs for God's specific purpose. The prophecy concerning the Church of Smyrna is grossly dismissed in its application for the last days. But it too is a prophecy for the very end time.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Like those represented by the Church of Philadelphia, the Church of Smyrna is blameless before God, guilty of nothing which requires their chastisement. Yet unlike Philadelphia, those represented by Smyrna are destined to die as martyrs. Those who think that only the last three messages—to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—apply to the last-day church are unaware Mr. Armstrong originally taught us *all seven messages* to the churches are for our admonition in these last days. Focusing on church eras only actually encourages us to *miss* important warnings that will play a major role in this very time. Why has no splinter group adopted the name Smyrna Church of God? Smyrna was beloved of God and praised for its faithfulness. Could it be because no one wants to volunteer to be a martyr? Oh yes, everyone wants to ascribe themselves to Philadelphia. Everyone wants to be protected in a place of safety. But is that really God's will for everyone?

What about the example of Stephen? He was absolutely zealous for God, and a mighty servant in proclaiming the Truth and serving God's people.

. . . and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy [Spirit] And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:5, 7–8).

Yet what was God's will for Stephen? Was it to protect him from harm as a reward for his faithfulness? Or did He have a greater purpose in mind? After Stephen fearlessly defended the gospel message to those Israelites who hated Jesus Christ, and convicted them in their hearts by his inspired words, what was the result?

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy [Spirit], looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him . . . (Acts 7:54–58).

Notice that God intervened to show Stephen a vision in the midst of this trial, which had the affect of making his accusers even more incensed. God not only did not stop it, He orchestrated the circumstances to instigate it! Why would He do such a thing?

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59–60).

Here Stephen—as he was having the life beaten out of him by the force of many crushing blows—manifested the quiet confidence and peace of mind to ask for his murderers' forgiveness. That could only happen by the Spirit of God dwelling mightily within him and granting him the power to trust completely in God. Such an example became an incredible witness to all who saw it. We know that Stephen's martyrdom not only did not crush the new fledgling Christian movement, but likely catapulted it to new heights under God's inspiration. This is a classic example of God's ability *and determination* to use martyrdom as a means to accomplish a grand work among men. Is it not likely this will also be the case in the last days in that grand work leading to the revelation of Jesus Christ?

What Is Your True Goal?

The question must be asked therefore, what if it is God's will that some of us fulfill the role of martyrs—like Stephen did—rather than be protected in a place of safety? Would you be willing to endure persecution and martyrdom to serve God? Or is your heart set only on being in a place of safety? Is your goal to be judged worthy of being born into the Family of God—and submitting to anything God might require toward that end—or are you fearfully insistent upon making it into a place of safety to continue your confidence in Him? What is your real goal as a member of God's Church? "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33).

There are yet many of God's people today who are absolutely petrified of the coming tribulation and persecution. That certainly is to be expected since it is a very normal human reaction. But remember, those led of the Spirit—those within the Body of Christ—are not to cater to those carnal pulls. Fear is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit. What will happen to those who cannot replace carnal fear with the confidence of God's resolute mind?

But *the fearful*, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Revelation 21:8) [emphasis mine].

To God, it is no better to be driven by fear and faithlessness than to be a murderer or a whoremonger. They will all meet the very same end.

Ministerial Predators of Human Fear

Yet there are a number of prominent splinter groups today who not only encourage this fear of the coming Great Tribulation, but use it as a tool to subjugate and cower their members.

They have capitalized upon the teaching about the place of safety to make it an idol in the minds of the people! Some have become so fearful of future persecution they are willing to follow blindly those who give them a "guarantee" of safety. This was the very same orientation that crept slowly into the Radio Church of God and has continued to dominate the thinking of many today who were once part of that body. Some within the ministry are still manipulating the laity today with a heavy-handed, abusive administration. Why do the people tolerate it? They believe God's Church—the spiritual organism—is synonymous with a particular physical organization. They have been convinced by certain men that remaining a "member-in-good-standing" within a particular group guarantees their favor with God. They are taught to do whatever the ministry says without question. They are told if the ministry is wrong, God will hold the ministry—not the laity—accountable. The laity's primary obligation is to obey church government. This—they are told—is their ticket into the place of safety.

What a racket! People are being promised an assurance of safety God never gave. And those presumptuously speaking in God's name are using this supposed stewardship over "place of safety reservations" as their source of influence over the fearful.

Brethren, we need to get any of these false notions out of our minds completely. We do not know who God will choose to safeguard in a safe place during the Great Tribulation. It is certainly going to happen, and it will be a real place of God's choosing, but no man today knows where that will be, when it will be, or who will be selected by God to be there. God is the one who will make those decisions, not man. The kind of manipulation going on today is no better than the Catholic Church selling indulgences or "free passes" out of Purgatory.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man (Luke 21:36).

There is a faithful remnant holding fast to the original doctrines Jesus Christ revealed through a chosen servant of the last days (Isaiah 1:9). But even among those now fellowshiping within that body—wherever it is—there is no guarantee they will all be in the place of safety. God's church has always existed within a mixed multitude. Just because someone is currently an active member of a group led by Jesus Christ does not mean that individual is diligently putting on the mind of Christ in his personal life. God is the one judging the hearts and the minds of His people. He knows who is truly crucifying the self and building the character necessary for spiritual success. He also knows who is coasting along and not bearing fruit, even if he/she might be regularly meeting in assembly with God's faithful people. There is no minister who can give anyone a guarantee of a free pass to the place of safety, and anyone who buys such a promise might as well purchase the Golden Gate Bridge while they are at it.

Will the Place of Safety Feel Safe?

One of the most common misconceptions about the place of safety is that once you "make it," its all a cakewalk from there to the return of Christ. It is almost as if people think the place of safety will be this bubble-wrapped environment with visible angels standing guard at every corner, giving everyone automatic peace of mind and surety. While usually not verbalized, the image people seem to have is sitting in an impermeable cocoon of peacefulness, watching from afar as horrible tribulation goes on outside, believing we have already made it and are just waiting out the next three and one-half years. But from where did such ideas come? Is that what God promised in any way?

The only thing God says is that it will be a place of safety. What does that mean? It means God intends to protect His people and will prevent any harm befalling them. But does that mean they will automatically *feel* safe, humanly?

When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, were they not His chosen covenant people? And did He not promise to protect them from harm?

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you (Deuteronomy 20:1–4).

So Israel was promised protection and *safety* by God. Did this mean they always *felt* safe? Not at all! In fact, they were tested as soon as they first walked out of Egypt, when God led them to the edge of the Red Sea. Being trapped between the mountain and the sea, what was their reaction when they saw the armies of Pharaoh bearing down upon them?

But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; *and they were sore afraid*: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Exodus 14:9–12) [emphasis mine].

Now stop and consider this question: At this particular point in time, where was the very safest place upon the earth for any human being to be? Was it not right there at the edge of the Red Sea? Why? Because God had determined to protect Israel, and He had no intention of allowing even the most powerful human army—or Satan—to harm them. No matter how impossible the situation seemed to those vulnerable people—who were absolutely convinced they were about to be slaughtered—the truth is, they were more safe than anyone else on the entire planet at that moment. Who is more safe than one miraculously protected by God?

Therefore, is it not plain that the Israelites were actually in a place of safety? It was a place God ordained to protect them, even though humanly it seemed like the very last place on earth one should be if he wanted to live. In spite of that fact, the Israelites were terrified. God's true place of safety seemed anything but safe to those carnal children who had no faith! Being safe and feeling safe are two different things. Did God ever promise that those protected in a place of safety would automatically *feel safe* being there? Do not count on it. Again, the just shall live by faith. What is very likely is that the ones who are allowed to be there will still require every ounce of faith to stay there in confidence. Remember the prophecy shows Satan will come after them to destroy, just like the armies of Pharaoh did.

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth (Revelation 12:14–16).

When you think about it, does that description not sound strikingly like the story of the Israelites at the Red Sea? They too were taken by God to a place of safety. Satan sent Pharaoh in his wrath to destroy them like a flood. God miraculously protected them and swallowed up the flood of that army in the sea. Just as He promised, Israel was as safe as could be during the whole experience. But they certainly did not feel safe during any of it.

Faith Is the Critical Ingredient

Always keep in mind, God has set up this time of proving and testing to force us to develop real character. Those who are successful will be those who use the Holy Spirit to develop very strong faith and confidence in God, even when everything around them in the flesh is screaming danger. All of the lessons of ancient Israel point to their failure because they could never really trust God to do what He promised. The physical threats around them were always more real to them than the invisible promises of God. Those who do not have the faith to stand

still and trust God—who try instead to save themselves by their own clever actions—will meet the same end as did the stiff-necked Israelites. They will not see that Promised Land—the Kingdom of God.

For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill (Isaiah 30:15–17).

What if it is not enough just to "make it" to the place of safety? What if the real test is to stay there when humanly it will appear to be the last place one wants to be? And what if God provides the means to run somewhere else, for those who have no faith to trust Him? The ancient Israelites had no such choice. They were boxed in with no escape. But does God not expect much more from spiritual Israel who has been given access to the Holy Spirit? Will not we be expected to bear much better fruit than our carnal forefathers? What if God then allows anyone who chooses to be in the place of safety? What if it is actually open to any who wills to go? What if the *real* test is believing God's promise to protect us there, when everything in the flesh is telling us there is certain death by going—and staying?

All too many have assumed we will never have a doubt when it is time to go, that it will be compellingly plain where to go, and that it will feel incredibly safe once we get there. But where is any of that promised by God? It is not! "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38). If God's primary purpose is to test our level of real faith, does it not make sense that making it to and staying confidently within the place of safety might actually require monumental faith?

What if God has orchestrated it so that *all* are eligible to be there? The thing is, it may well be that the only ones who will be *willing* to go—and stay—are the ones who have already developed that level of real faith in God and His promises. God might have many different scenarios in mind. But count on the fact faith will be the required ingredient for success. Anyone who does not have the faith to act and follow God wherever He leads—who holds back to try and save himself—will fall into the pit and suffer tribulation. Remember what happened when the remnant Israelites were terrified of the approaching Babylonians, as told in Jeremiah 41 and 42? They sought Jeremiah to ask God what they should do, stay put or flee to Egypt. God told Jeremiah to tell them to stay where they were, and God promised to miraculously intervene to give them favor. "Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand" (Jeremiah 42:11). But their human wisdom compelled them otherwise, and they did what seemed right to them—fleeing to Egypt—even though God also warned them what would befall them if they did so.

And now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; Then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die (Jeremiah 42:15–16).

Brethren, it is very likely this same kind of test will be before us in these last days. There will be an authorized messenger of God who will proclaim God's instructions. If you cannot discern how to identify the true servants from the false, you will never be able to have confidence in that command, whatever it may be. But if that message from God also tells us to do that which humanly seems reckless and foolish, how many of us will have the faith to trust Him? How many instead will do just as the remnant of Judah—who analyzed things with good human wisdom and did precisely what God said not to do—and end-up falling into the very trap they are seeking to avoid? All of these tests will likely play a very strong part in the last-day place of safety story.

If that is true, where will that leave those who think their ministers will get them into the place of safety? If real faith is required to be there and stay there, what will befall those who are not really focused now on putting on more of the mind of Christ? How unprepared will those be who spend their time instead putting their trust in men to save them, and not diligently working to overcome the carnal mind?

Oh yes, there certainly will be a place of safety as God has promised. But the only ones who will be there are the ones who are learning to trust God now, and will not need to learn that lesson the hard way. And even among those who are strong in faith, it still may be God's will for some to participate in a work of martyrdom, as did Stephen. The real thing we should be focused on is strengthening our commitment and devotion to putting God first in our lives. Passing the little tests day by day is part of the training program preparing us for the big tests to come. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Do we have the faith to trust God no matter what sacrifice He will require of us in the flesh? Is our focus that of qualifying for Sonship in the Kingdom of God, or are we counting on a man to get us a free pass into the place of safety? Those who are spiritually alert—not asleep—will be using every moment to prepare for those monumental events on the horizon, before the glorious return of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Your humble servant,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jon W. Brisby